



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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COMMISSIONER

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January 15, 2019

Stanley Brezenoff
Interim Chair and CEO
New York City Housing Authority
250 Broadway, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Throggs Neck Houses
Referrals for Consideration of Employee Disciplinary Action

Dear Chair Brezenoff:

The New York City Department of Investigation, Office of the Inspector General for NYCHA ("OIG"), has concluded an investigation concerning alleged employee misconduct at Throggs Neck Houses that led NYCHA to implement an across-the-board staff transfer of 45 employees to other developments in August 2018. DOI investigators conducted over 40 interviews of employees and residents and reviewed video recordings and photographs, personnel files, timesheets, work orders, purchasing records, phone records, and other documents.

After the staff transfer from Throggs Neck, NYCHA came under intense public scrutiny. News media reported "after-hours, boozed-up sex parties," with supervisors pressuring subordinates to participate,¹ also involving "residents and children,"² with "up to a dozen people taking part in the orgies."³ Throggs Neck Resident Association President Monique Johnson claimed that video and audio recordings were taken of staff having sex both on and off NYCHA premises,⁴ and showed a news reporter "disturbing pictures."⁵ However, when OIG interviewed Johnson and other Resident Association officers, they reported that they had only heard rumors of misconduct, but that in fact they had not witnessed any parties, drinking, or sexual activity.

¹ Kerry Burke and Greg B. Smith, "Lust Exit to Bronx," *Daily News*, 8/28/18

² Monica Morales, Monica Makes It Happen, *PIX11 on Facebook Live*, 8/29/18

³ Kenneth Garger, Nolan Hicks & Chris Perez, "Boozy NYCHA 'Orgies,'" *New York Post*, 8/28/18

⁴ See footnote 2

⁵ See footnote 2. This article indicated: "According to the Tenant President here Monique Johnson there are videotapes, audio recordings of sex parties between Supervisors, workers, and tenants."

Notably, OIG found no evidence of sex parties or misconduct involving residents or children. However, this investigation did find evidence of a culture of misconduct, employee mistreatment, and favoritism, led by former Throggs Neck managers Brianne Pawson⁶ and Wallace Vereen.⁷

1. Pawson and Vereen Threatened Subordinates' Physical Safety and Took No Action When Threats Were Reported

Multiple Throggs Neck employees alleged that Pawson and Vereen threatened violence, directly and indirectly, towards subordinate employees, and that when these employees reported the threats to management, nothing was done. For example, on one occasion Pawson said in front of several employees that one caretaker "should rape" another caretaker. A witness said she reported this statement to Vereen, who challenged her veracity and failed to report the incident or take other action. Other employees reported a rumor that Pawson said that she wanted to kidnap the same caretaker, tie her up, throw her in the trunk of a car, and throw her in the river so her body would not be found.

Another caretaker alleged that at Pawson's direction, two coworkers drove up in a NYCHA truck to where he was working and demanded that he move or they would "crash" him. He further reported that when he brought up this incident with Pawson, she told him to "leave them alone" and "let it go." This caretaker also reported that when Pawson came to believe that a maintenance worker had filed a complaint of bullying, she said in front of several subordinates that she wanted someone to go to the employee's house and break his legs.

Another caretaker alleged that she was threatened by Pawson's then-boyfriend, who said he would punch her in the face because he believed she had circulated photos of Pawson. The caretaker stated that she reported this incident to her supervisors, who took no action.

Multiple workers stated that they suffered retaliation after being deemed "rats" or "snitches." One employee reported that, in Pawson's presence, he was threatened by a coworker who said that she could have her boyfriend, a Bloods member, kill him. The same employee further alleged that Vereen claimed to be a "m—f—ing gangster and I got the tattoos to show it" and showed him a tattoo on his arm that read "TNB."⁸

One employee reported that after she had obtained an Order of Protection against her child's father due to domestic violence, she learned that he came to Throggs Neck and spoke with Pawson in an effort to find out where the employee was located. This employee asked NYCHA for a safety transfer to a different development, writing "I just would like for my whereabouts [sic] not to be conversed with any supervisor[s] at Throggs Neck [H]ouses."

⁶ Pawson began working at Throggs Neck Houses in April 2016 as a provisional Assistant Superintendent, but failed the required civil service exam in July 2017. Consequently in August 2017, she was demoted to Supervisor of Caretakers, again at Throggs Neck. In May 2018, she was laterally transferred to Supervising Housing Groundskeeper at Throggs Neck.

⁷ Vereen came to Throggs Neck as the Superintendent in August 2016. In November 2017, the Throggs Neck Housing Manager went out on extended medical leave, and Vereen served as acting Housing Manager in addition to Superintendent.

⁸ This may be a reference to "The Nasty Boys" street crew from the nearby South Bronx.

2. Pawson and Vereen Drank Alcohol While at Work and Pawson Frequently Held Parties in Her NYCHA Office

Numerous Throggs Neck employees reported that Pawson frequently held parties and drank alcohol with subordinates in the Grounds Shop during work hours. These employees alleged that Pawson would send a caretaker to a nearby bodega with her Chase debit card and her PIN number to buy alcohol for the group. The store confirmed that the caretaker came in at least twice a week to buy alcohol. In addition, bank records show that Pawson frequently made purchases at the nearby Wine & Liquor Superstore and other liquor stores on days that she was working at Throggs Neck. Employees reported that Pawson routinely walked around the Throggs Neck development drinking from a plastic cup filled with alcohol and Red Bull during working hours. After the staff transfer from Throggs Neck on August 24, 2018, NYCHA supervisors found a bottle of vodka, chilled shot glasses and beer mugs, wine, and Solo cups in an employee refrigerator.

In May 2018, a caretaker was arrested for Driving While Intoxicated with a Blood Alcohol Content over twice the legal limit, after crashing into a police car shortly after she punched out of work at Throggs Neck. A coworker reported that this caretaker frequently drank alcohol with Pawson in the afternoons while on duty.

In addition, one caretaker alleged that Vereen drank on the job because he could smell it on his breath and "hear it from the way he talked," because he would become hard to understand.

3. Pawson and Vereen Allowed Employees to Leave Their Assigned Posts While on Duty

Many witnesses reported that Pawson allowed employees in her clique to leave the Throggs Neck premises while on duty, especially during an overtime assignment in early 2018 when a water main broke and needed 24-hour monitoring. On some occasions, Pawson allegedly allowed subordinates to clock in, leave the development for an entire 8-hour overtime shift, then return to clock out. Similarly, an employee alleged that Vereen had a subordinate, with whom he was having a sexual relationship, spend an entire overtime shift in his office.

In addition, Pawson routinely sat in her personal car at the end of her work shift before clocking out. CCTV video footage shows that during one week in August 2018, on four out of five days, Pawson lingered in the parking lot before clocking out. On one of these days, she submitted an Alternate Time Sheet instead of punching out.

4. Vereen and Pawson Abused Their Authority by Retaliating Against and Pushing Out Disfavored Employees

Many employees stated that Pawson and Vereen gave better work assignments to subordinates in their clique, and conversely that they pushed out disfavored employees from Throggs Neck. Development staff reported that Pawson and Vereen each were involved in sexual relationships with multiple subordinates, and that both managers improperly favored their paramours in work-related decisions. One employee had a consensual relationship with Pawson, but alleged that after he broke up with her, he was given "twice the work" and subjected to threats until he was forced to quit. Another employee reported that when female subordinates refused to have sex with Vereen, he would make their time at work "miserable."

Multiple staff alleged that Vereen often threatened to fire subordinates or told them to quit if they would not do what he told them to, and that Throggs Neck employees understood they had to "work by

what Wally wants" regardless of whether it was in their job description. Vereen reportedly bragged that he ran Throggs Neck "like a jail."

A long-time Throggs Neck caretaker "X"⁹ stated that when Vereen and Pawson came to the development, they engaged in "instant bullying" and began targeting him and other staff. Vereen then attempted to verbally demote him to a janitorial caretaker "J"¹⁰ position until the employee contacted Human Resources and was reinstated. Soon after, the caretaker had a stroke and went out on disability.

Similarly, numerous staff report that Pawson "set up" another caretaker by instructing a coworker to provoke her into an argument, and then had the caretaker arrested for engaging in workplace violence. After the incident, Vereen allegedly pressured an individual who broke up the argument to falsely claim he had been hit in the face and injured.

The Supervising Housing Groundskeeper ("SHG"), who had worked at Throggs Neck for decades, was reportedly pressured into early retirement by Vereen and Pawson, who stripped away his authority until he quit. Within days after the SHG's departure, Pawson took over his job duties at the Grounds Shop, although Vereen did not complete the official process to appoint her to the position until months later. A Bronx Borough manager indicated that this maneuver does "not sound appropriate" under civil service and NYCHA policies. Pawson never obtained the pesticide safety license legally required by the SHG job description.

In summer 2017, Pawson failed the civil service test for Assistant Superintendent and was demoted. Vereen and Pawson reportedly launched a campaign against the new Assistant Superintendent, bullying him, telling his subordinates not to follow his instructions, and claiming that he was going to fail his probationary period. Pawson and Vereen allegedly asked a coworker, who was close to the new Assistant Superintendent, to try to persuade him to choose a different work location. The new Assistant Superintendent became so uncomfortable that he asked Bronx management to assign him to a different development, or even to demote him back to his former technician position.

5. Pawson Intentionally Sabotaged NYCHA Appliances Intended for Residents' Apartments

As part of their efforts to obstruct the new Assistant Superintendent, Pawson and Vereen allegedly refused to give him access to refrigerators and stoves so that he could not complete his duties preparing "move-out" apartments for new tenants. A colleague helped him by calling other developments to get the needed appliances.

On one occasion, a caretaker witnessed Pawson using scissors to cut the power cords on four used refrigerators, which he believed was done so that the new Assistant Superintendent could not do his job. The same caretaker stated that Pawson knew she would not be caught because there are no cameras in the basement area.

On a different occasion, another caretaker encountered Pawson instructing a maintenance worker to cut the wires on three refrigerators with wire cutters. The caretaker believed that Pawson wanted tenants to receive broken refrigerators so that they would complain about the new Assistant Superintendent.

⁹ The position of Caretaker "X" is responsible for driving development vehicles, assisting with pickup of supplies and garbage, and preparing apartment move-outs for incoming tenants.

¹⁰ The position of Janitorial caretaker "J" duties include mopping hallways and servicing building trash compactors.

6. Pawson and Vereen Threw Away Valuable NYCHA Equipment and Circumvented NYCHA Procurement Rules

Immediately after the former SHG retired, Pawson renovated the Grounds Shop using Throggs Neck subordinates and contractors, with assistance from employees supervised by her father Charles Pawson, a long-time executive manager at NYCHA, who has since retired. Witnesses reported that Pawson directed crews to throw away everything in the shop, including NYCHA equipment that was in working condition, such as leaf blowers, weed whackers, snow blowers, lawn mowers, drills, saws, and brand-new pallets of sand. Experienced staff set aside certain equipment in secret to save it for future use. Pawson then ordered all new equipment.

Also during this time period, Pawson ordered nine black leather executive chairs, three 43" flat-screen TV's, file cabinets, and a conference table, for a total cost of almost \$4,000. Vereen personally approved several of these purchases.

NYCHA development managers are permitted to hire private contractors to perform work via "small procurement" contracts under \$5,000. For contracts exceeding \$5,000 in the aggregate, procurement rules require multiple bids, outreach to MWSBE bidders,¹¹ and involvement by external NYCHA departments. During one month in early 2017, Pawson submitted and Vereen approved five separate contracts for a single company to power wash a series of Throggs Neck buildings, as follows: "Buildings #1-6" for \$4,790; "Buildings #7-12" for \$4,850; "Buildings #13-18" for \$4,875; "Buildings #19-24" for \$4,850; and "Buildings #30-33" for \$4,820. By breaking up the job into separate contracts, commonly known as "bid splitting" or "bill splitting," Pawson and Vereen avoided compliance with NYCHA's procurement rules.

7. Vereen was Aware of Pawson's Routine Misconduct but Failed to Act to Protect Other NYCHA Employees or to Enforce NYCHA Rules

Multiple employees reported that they reported misconduct to acting Housing Manager Vereen, who took no responsive action. One employee stated that when he asked to speak to Vereen about Pawson in private, Vereen refused and told him, "whatever you have to say you can say in front of her," referring to Pawson.

As reported by Pawson's coworkers and confirmed by video footage, Pawson did not wear a NYCHA-issued uniform as required by NYCHA procedure. A caretaker reported that she wore "only Victoria's Secret" clothing but was never admonished. Video recordings also corroborate allegations that Pawson smoked cigarettes both inside and near NYCHA buildings, in violation of NYCHA policy.

During the two years Vereen supervised Pawson at Throggs Neck Houses, Vereen did not take any disciplinary action against Pawson.

¹¹ Minority-owned, Women-owned, and Small Business Enterprises

Chair Stanley Brezenoff

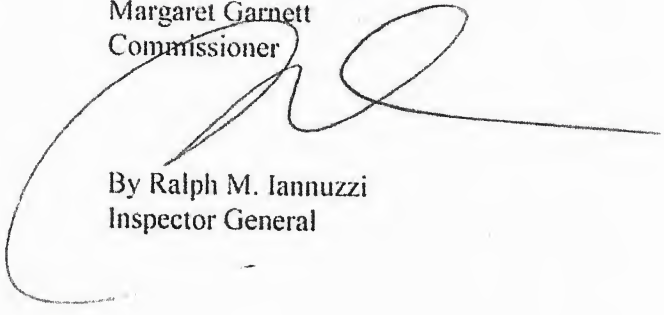
January 15, 2019

Page 6 of 6

We are referring these findings to you for consideration of appropriate employee disciplinary action against Brianne Pawson and Wallace Vereen. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me at (212) 306-8316.

Sincerely,

Margaret Garnett
Commissioner



By Ralph M. Iannuzzi
Inspector General

cc: Vito Mustaciuolo, General Manager
Cathy Pennington, Executive Vice President of Operations
Terence Schwartz, Chief, Employee Disciplinary Division
Nicole Van Gendt, Director, Human Resources Department